

INFLUENCE OF THE RANDOLPH-SHEPPARD ACT ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF BLIND PERSONS

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(Mr. Clunk was invited to prepare this article because of his participation in the placement of blind persons beginning in 1919, and because much of the development was due directly to the results he was privileged to achieve)

During the years between 1921 and 1940 it seemed to me that I was the only person at the AAWB conventions vigorously promoting industrial placement of the blind. I therefore undertake to present the facts in this article, impersonally and objectively.

Employment prior to 1928

Most of today's rehabilitation personnel are of the opinion that employment of blind persons in industry and other occupations began with the second World War in 1941. There also is the impression that the last twenty-five years of specialized rehabilitation services have been sufficient to thoroughly educate the buyers of skills to accept blind labor on the same basis as though the individual were sighted.

In order to understand the influence of the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936 on the employment of blind persons and their general problem, it is necessary to briefly review prior developments and results.

A considerable number of blind persons were engaged in professions, clerical occupations, rural activities and in production industry for many years before 1936. Aggressive capable individuals without physical sight developed their own careers without the aid of governmental or professional placement officers.

Office recording equipment opened a few doors of opportunity for typists, and a number of capable blind persons were outstanding in the field of law, osteopathy, chiropractic, salesmanship, teaching and politics. A number of blind persons supported their families and community by continuing in their rural careers, but these persons were not conspicuous, and the lack of advertising of their achievements produced the impression that blind persons could not function in a rural environment.

Special Pioneers in the Field

During the first World War, 1914-1918, blind persons in production industry assembled many kinds of small items and achieved a considerable reputation for accuracy in the inspection field.

Many industrial placements of these types were made by such pioneers as Mrs. Eva B. Palmer, Cleveland Society for the Blind, 1914-1920; Miss Mary Hulburt in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1915-1925; William Dresden, Detroit League for the Handicapped, 1915-1927; Francis Ierardi and Miss Florence Birchard, Massachusetts Division for the Blind 1915-1925.

The employment secured by these pioneers was almost entirely in the field of assembly of such items as nuts and bolts, wire rope clamps, stove burner parts, packing of toys, cosmetics, assembly of paper box parts, etc. Occasional placements were made in such industries as metal fabrication, shoes, candy and biscuits. Most of the industrial placements up to 1925 were in Chicago, Cleveland, Milwaukee, Minneapolis and Detroit.

In 1920 the Cleveland Society for the Blind made the first placements of blind persons as machine operators in metal fabricating businesses, and they were placed as operators of drill presses, milling machines, punch presses and related equipment. It fell to me as a young newly-blinded man to develop the method of analyzing industrial jobs by working on each process for an hour or more in the same manner as though employed by the company. This procedure enabled the employer to understand that various machines did not require sight on the part of an operator, and that persons without sight but possessing adequate basic ability could be employed as easily as sighted machine operators.

Lesson Learned in 1921 Depression

In the same year, 1920, I placed totally blind persons as machine operators in threading pipe couplings in the steel mills of Youngstown, Ohio and as employees in other metal fabricating plants of the area. In 1925 while training a local blind staff member of the Pittsburgh Association for the Blind, I placed people in a dozen principal industries in Pittsburgh.

In spite of this activity, industrial employment of blind persons continued to be restricted to a few cities in which a local administrator had special interest in the subject. The loss of jobs during the depression of 1921 convinced most workers for the blind that blind labor could only be used in a national crisis or in rare periods of top level prosperity. Thus, competitive employment was looked upon as an ideal that could only be realized when the nation was in an economic boom or crisis.

Also, regardless of the industrial placements made in the midwest between 1914-1925, industrialists and government administrators were not convinced as to the abilities of blind persons. In addition, blind persons did not believe that sighted employers would treat them fairly and would pay them the same wages as paid to the sighted.

Working In Broom Shops, Weaving Rugs

During this period, blind persons and their sighted friends were convinced that the sheltered workshop or the casual home industry program provided the principal answer for employment and wages to blind persons. Certain trades became traditional, and regardless of training and occupation prior to blindness, society, through the agencies, sentenced the newly-blinded adult to these "Blind Trades".

Blinded lawyers, doctors and business executives found themselves working in broom shops or weaving rugs or caning chairs along with blind persons, who had formerly been factory workers, construction laborers, or with persons who had no occupation prior to blindness. Basketry also was a favorite trade in which the blind person could be employed. These jobs were acceptable because they involved a large amount of handwork without the use of power equipment, and they were looked upon as safe and ideal for this reason.

A few individuals were trained in the operation of domestic sewing machines in their homes where they made simple designed aprons and hemmed a few towels, but even here, blind women were encouraged to do hand hemming instead of machine work because it occupied them more and restricted their production. Hand weaving of rag rugs was a favorite source of employment because it kept the blind person busy and was low in production. The caning of chairs is a slow and laborious process, and this, too, became an ideal trade for a few blind persons who possessed adequate skill.

It was also in this period that the public and the agencies serving the blind developed the philosophy that a blind person should be employed only in a trade or occupation where all processes or functions could be performed without sight and that it was unethical and in fact "unlawful" for sighted persons to work with a blind group, or for a workshop to make any article that required sighted labor for any of the processes.

Comparative Earnings 'Out of Order'

It is difficult to understand the reasons for the establishment of this philosophy for blind persons, that is so far removed from the principles involved in the employment of sighted persons, either handicapped or unhandicapped. None of the sighted groups are restricted to the production of articles in which every process is performed by a handicapped sighted worker. However, agencies for the blind established the principle that all the processes in the manufacturing of an article and every activity involved in a profession should be performed by the blind person and sighted co-workers should not be included.

A blind person making articles at home was required to be a designer, manufacturer and a purchasing agent for his own materials, a salesman for the finished product and a capitalist to finance materials and equipment. Such qualifications are not required from any other group of either normal or handicapped persons. Because of this point of view, the variety of employment in the sheltered shops, and the earnings of blind persons were restricted. Many agency directors were also convinced that blind workers had no right to receive more than \$10 per week, and, of course, earnings equal to those of the sighted in the same occupation were completely out of order.

The administrators of the Rehabilitation Act of 1920 did not change any of these concepts or improve employment for the average blind person. The philosophy of the agency was expressed by one state director who said, "Blindness is considered to be a total disability by all insurance companies and compensation boards, and I do not see how we can do anything for a person who is totally disabled."

For these reasons, blind persons were declared to be generally non feasible for rehabilitation services, and only an occasional person was accepted for college training or for work in a sheltered shop.

Effect of Depression from 1929-1939

During the period, 1929-1939, the advocates of public assistance in all forms promoted Federal and State legislation that would give direct financial help to blind persons, on the premise that they could not be employed. The dependency of blind persons was exploited by these promoters, and the capabilities of the employable blind individual were subordinated and buried.

This ten-year period contained more despair and hopelessness for capable blind persons than any other decade in the Twentieth Century because no one could foretell the end of the depression, and everyone hoped that it would not require another World War to end it. Because blind persons could not secure normal employment, some effort was made to soften their problem in the activities related to the operation of small business.

Thus, in 1932, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order which permitted blind persons to sell newspapers and periodicals from profitable newsstands in Federal buildings. This was a recognition of a problem but not an answer. About this time various bills were presented to Congress seeking permission to operate refreshment stands in Federal buildings, but none of these were approved until the Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, and the administration of this act did not begin until 1937. The results of the administration of this act in the refreshment stands have been well described in other articles.

Both employers of labor and the social agencies of the United States had no difficulty in excusing the idleness of blind persons during this period when practically all business reduced the numbers of its personnel, reduced wages of those still employed, and expressed the opinion that blind persons should not expect to work when so many of their sighted friends were unemployed. The Government work projects of this period absorbed a small number of blind persons in Braille projects but not enough to make any real impression on the problem.

The business in sheltered workshops suffered along with other businesses and blind persons lost their jobs. In order to stabilize the employment in the sheltered shops, Peter J. Salmon, Executive Director of the Industrial Home for the Blind in Brooklyn, New York and Robert B. Irwin, Director of the American Foundation for the Blind in New York developed legislation that would permit Federal departments of government to buy brooms, mops and other articles made by the sheltered shops and to do so without competitive bidding at a fair market price.

The Wagner-O'Day Act was approved in 1939, and the President's Committee on the Purchase of Blind Made Products was created. The law requires a liaison nonprofit organization to direct the assignment of government-use purchase orders and to supervise the relationships between the sheltered workshops, the Committee, and the Federal departments. The results of this legislation and the operation of it through National Industries for the Blind is a major story in itself. In this discussion it is sufficient to state that employment for blind persons in the sheltered shops has been expanded and stabilized beyond the imagination of anyone in the depression period. The expanded variety of products in the sheltered shops is doing much to favorably influence the acceptance of blind workers in competitive industry at the present time and wages to

these workers are equal to those paid to sighted workers for the same production.

Canadian Development and Influence — 1928-1937

The first organized placement activity on a planned and permanent basis began in Canada in 1928. Colonel E. A. Baker, Managing Director, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Toronto, Canada, believed that capable blind persons could perform production processes in industry making peace time merchandise just as well as they could be employed in war time making parts for armament. Canada had been in a depression since the first World War, and Colonel Baker looked upon the development of a placement department in a depression as an opportunity to develop and validate sound, practical placement techniques, and the results supported his confidence in these principles.

During the period of 1918-1928 the Canadian National Institute for the Blind employed three sighted persons to develop a placement department, but they were unsuccessful. In 1928, Colonel Baker offered the opportunity to me to build this department and to use the same methods and principles that had been successful in Cleveland, Youngstown, Ohio and Pittsburgh, Penn. I accepted the challenge and began the campaign on May 1, 1928. The principal qualifications possessed by me for the assignment were a fair amount of manual dexterity, unlimited enthusiasm, a missionary spirit, but above all confidence in the ability and desire of blind persons to work.

By 1930 the placement department had more blind persons at work in production industry and in vending stands than were employed by all five sheltered workshops in the Dominion. The skills of blind persons in industry and in business were presented to the Canadian employer on the same basis as other salesmen promoted the use of efficient but little-known equipment to the buyer, and the Canadian National Institute assumed full and permanent responsibility for continuing good results to the employer in the same way as a manufacturer of machinery guarantees results to his customer.

700 Placed Between 1928-1937

Young, totally blind men were recruited and trained for staff work and assigned to each of the Provinces. With the exception of myself, none of these pioneers had more than a high school education, and they placed blind men and women in the production industries of Canada during the worst economic depression the country ever had experienced. They proved that Colonel Baker was correct in his original assumption.

The department placed 700 blind persons in the period between 1928-1937 and developed the confidence of Canadian industry to such a degree that by 1931 the Institute began to receive invitations to bring blind persons to the plants. Many industries also invited the agencies to take over old stands or install new refreshment stands in their plants because of the satisfactory results produced by the administration of these services, and by 1937 the Institute was the largest operator of industrial refreshment business in the Dominion. The placement department has continued to function along the same lines in the employment of blind persons in competitive industry and the management of industrial lunch services has become as traditional in Canada as "any of the blind trades."

In 1934, Leonard A. Robinson (totally blind) of Cleveland, Ohio, readily accepted the suggestion from Canada that industrial placement should be included in the legislation that he was then single handedly promoting to establish vending stands in Federal and other buildings in the United States. The Congressional sponsors of the legislation, Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas and Congressman Jennings Randolph of West Virginia, readily agreed. The proof of the possibilities of industrial employment and successful vending stand operation was supplied by employer testimonial letters and photographs of a wide variety of placement made in Canada.

Finally Federal administrators and legislators were persuaded that equally good results should be possible in the United States, and accordingly, the Randolph-Sheppard Act gave its blessing to all types of employment for blind persons in addition to the operation of vending stands.*

There is every reason to believe that the Randolph-Sheppard Act would never have been approved without the evidence and proof of practicality supplied by the Canadian development. Equal employment results in any other country would not have been accepted as completely because of differences with the United States in social and economic conditions. However, Canadian life is so nearly an exact duplicate of conditions in the United States that acceptance was almost compulsory. Many of the Canadian industries employers are subsidiaries of United States corporations with identical manufacturing and business conditions.

Beginning of Industrial and other Placement

When the Act was approved in June, 1936, there was no one actively working in the United States with any experience in the field of industrial placement or successful concession operation by blind persons. The Randolph-Sheppard Act was the first legislation enacted by Congress specifically aimed at the development of employment for blind persons. Of course, other legislation aimed at the employment of handicapped persons had been enacted, but the blind always were classified as non-feasible and unemployable and, therefore, the services to them were excluded by the administrators of such general legislation.

The Randolph-Sheppard Act was assigned to the Rehabilitation Service by the Commissioner of Education but the staff was not employed to administer the Act until June, 1937. Because the Act required that 50 percent of the personnel must be blind persons, I was invited to return to the United States from Canada and to administer the Act.

Thus, I became the first blind person to be employed under Civil Service by the Federal Government, and probably the first under any Civil Service in the United States. Within six months a blind dictaphone typist was employed under Civil Service, and within a year the Department had persuaded the

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(H.R. 4688)

SEC. 2. (a)

- (2) Make surveys throughout the United States of industries with a view of obtaining information that will assist blind persons to obtain employment;
- (3) Make available to the public, and especially to persons and organizations engaged in work for the blind, information obtained as a result of such surveys.

Federal Civil Service Commission to permit blind persons to qualify and receive appointments as attorneys in several Federal Departments.

By 1939, blind persons were accepted under Civil Service as inspectors and in other types of industrial employment in the munition depots in the armed services. By 1942, the Civil Service Commission of the Federal Government opened the doors of Federal employment to qualified blind persons in any department where the administrators would accept such employees.

Lacked Trained Placement Officers

In 1939, the Federal Service persuaded the New Hampshire Division for the Blind to establish the first farm training school for blind persons, and this was followed about 1946 by the second farm training center, operated in Ohio, by the Cincinnati Association for the Blind.

The development of industrial placement under the Act was not started until 1939 because of the complete absence of experienced or trained placement officers. None of the public or private agencies for the blind or rehabilitation agencies employed any one specifically assigned to the industrial placement of blind persons, and the administrator of the Act waited for a suitable candidate who could be trained and assigned to a local area.

O. E. Day, (totally blind) a mechanical engineer in Elwood, Indiana, requested help in his own rehabilitation problems. Because of his experience prior to blindness, and his personality, arrangements were made for him to receive six months of peripatetic field training with the placement department of Canadian National Institute for the Blind, under the leadership of Lindsay G. Williamson. He began this training in the spring of 1940.

The Overbrook School for the Blind in Philadelphia requested the Federal Service for the Blind to recruit and train someone who could place the graduates of the school. The superintendent employed Mr. Day at the conclusion of his training in Canada, and the first trained placement officer in the United States assumed his duties in Philadelphia in September, 1940.

The Federal Service continued the training of O. E. Day by assisting him in making the first industrial placements in Philadelphia. Thus began a procedure which resulted in the training, employment and assignment of placement officers in various parts of the country. Arthur Voorhees and Carl Hvarre in New Jersey, James Hyka in Cleveland, John McGettigan in Pittsburgh, August McCullom in Kansas, Kenneth McCullom in Connecticut, Floyd Lacy in Texas, Carston Ohnstead in Oklahoma, Carlos Gattis in Arkansas, John McCauley in Seattle, Huben Walker in Tennessee, Walker Moran in Maine, J. Hiram Chappel in Oregon and Anthony Septinelli of California. Most of these totally blind men received their practical field training in Canada. In 1942, John McAulay (totally blind) of Seattle, Washington, joined the Federal staff. By agreement with the local agencies, he conducted intensive placement campaigns of thirty days each in Louisiana, Colorado and Delaware, and demonstrated to these areas and to the country that industrial placement of blind persons was not restricted to any one area.

The activities of these unofficially trained placement agents resulted in the employment of several hundred blind persons in the war industries of the nation by 1943.

Influence on New Legislation

In 1942, the National Society for the Blind in Washington, D. C., requested the agencies for the Blind to provide information on the employment of blind persons in each of the states in any occupation other than sheltered workshops and vending stands. Approximately 8,000 persons were reported as employed and some states reported complete absence of employed blind persons.

These self-developed occupations included a large variety of types of jobs and professions and provided conclusive evidence to the effect that blindness itself did not prohibit the participation of aggressive individuals in any occupation for which they had basic talent and ability. Federal administrators and members of Congress were amazed at the evidence of the wide activities of blind persons, achieved through their own resources, and as a result the Federal Security Administrator approved special services for blind persons in the developing of the 1943 Bardon-LaFollette Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1920.

As the Randolph-Sheppard Act was the first legislation aimed at the development of employment for blind persons, the Bardon-LaFollette Act of 1943 was the first to authorize grants of Federal funds to the states specifically for the rehabilitation of blind persons, and it was the first Federal recognition of the responsibilities of State agencies for the blind in the employment field.

First Federal Dollar to North Carolina

As nearly as a survey could determine in 1942, all the states combined reported less than \$25,000 assigned to all rehabilitation case services for the blind for that year, and this included the states in which the pioneering placement officers were functioning. The first Federal dollar assigned to a state specifically for the rehabilitation of blind persons was given to the State of North Carolina in December, 1943. The State agencies for the blind soon recognized the need for State appropriation to match Federal grants, and the present day march toward personal achievements for thousands of blind persons began at that time.

Because of the recognition of the problem in the Bardon-LaFollette Amendments, and the availability of funds, the first group training classes for totally blind placement officers were developed in the spring of 1944, and nine trainees were admitted in each of these classes of six weeks' duration. Three were conducted in Baltimore, Md.; two in Chicago, Ill.; one in Atlanta, Ga.; and two in Washington, D. C. during 1944 and 1945. On each occasion, twenty different types of industry in each community cooperated by permitting the trainees to work in their plants on standardized production processes selected by the Federal staff.

Thus, in four weeks of the training period each trainee had actual work experience on approximately one hundred different processes in twenty kinds of typical production plants, most of which are found in every state. These plants included electrical appliances, electric motors, machine shops, bakeries, laundry and dry cleaning, wood fabrications, clothing, food processing, department stores, plastic production, sheet metal printing and paper processing, textile production, plumbing materials, batteries, radio and television, farm machinery and furniture. In addition to this factory experience in job

demonstration, the trainees received intensive training in analysis of legislation, public speaking, employer interviewing and showmanship. The first training courses for groups of business enterprises, specialists and rural occupation specialists were conducted during this period.

J. Hiram Chappell (totally blind) a member of the Federal staff, conducted the rural training courses and the continuous field service required to assist these rural specialists in their assignments in the several states. Thus, the problems of blind persons in rural areas received attention and services for the first time.

Comparative Results

In 1936 the general rehabilitation agencies for the sighted of the country reported two blind persons as being rehabilitated. In 1950 all the agencies reported more than 3,400 blind persons as being rehabilitated. Last year, 5,450 blind persons were reported as rehabilitated. The agencies for the blind appropriated more than \$6,500,000 in 1965, and the Federal Services assigned more than \$11,000,000 to the states for the same purpose. It required three years to find a suitable candidate to begin industrial placement in 1940. This was the only local placement agent in the entire country, and last year, 736 individuals were employed as professional rehabilitation personnel in 37 state agencies for the blind. Of these, 314 of these have placement responsibilities.

The first adjustment training center for handicapped persons was one for the blind in Daytona Beach, Florida, in 1947, and this has been followed by similar adjustment training centers on a state-wide or regional basis in all parts of the United States and in many foreign countries.

Even though Federal and State Governments now assign approximately \$20,000,000 a year for the rehabilitation of blind persons and more than 1,000 professional staff people are employed for public and private agencies for the blind, the employer public in 1966 still possesses an emotional resistance to the acceptance of physically blind persons as employees that is not much less than the resistance possessed and expressed by employers before the enactment of the Randolph-Sheppard Act. Intensive sales methods and public relations activity are required to keep the old doors of employment open and to find new ones.

World Influence

The World Conference on the Welfare of the Blind at Oxford, England, in 1949, gave very little attention to competitive employment of blind persons in production industries, and the entire matter was looked upon as a dream for the future. The Paris meeting of the World Council of 1954 gave considerable time to this subject because the results achieved in the United States and Canada had become known to the participating countries, and a few of them had started similar developments. The Rome conference, 1959, gave practically all of the time of the convention to the employment of blind persons in every kind of occupation, and delegates from the participating countries boasted about their results, and they were justifiably proud of them. The same conference in New York in 1964 was unqualified in its acceptance of the abilities of blind persons to participate as staff members in the agencies and in the local industries and occupations of all the nations of the world. These world wide results owe their existence to the results in the United States and Canada.

If the Randolph-Sheppard Act had never been approved it is quite probable that all placement services for the blind would not have been developed on a planned aggressive basis in the United States, and no one knows when it might have started. Without the results produced by the pioneering placement agents, there would have been no evidence to support and encourage special attention for the blind in the Bardon-LaFollette Amendments of 1943. Although an executive order of the President in 1932 had granted permission to blind persons to sell newspapers and periodicals in Federal buildings, the unsatisfactory operation of these unsupervised news stands had practically closed the doors of Federal buildings to this activity by 1936.

Owe Much to Randolph-Sheppard Act

The article in "Blindness 1965" described the results in vending stands under the Randolph-Sheppard Act and requires no elaboration here. Without the Randolph-Sheppard Act the various pioneering placement agents would not have been employed because no one in the United States would have coaxed the agencies into such action. It is unlikely that the Federal Government would have accepted blind persons and permitted them to qualify for Federal employment for many years although they might have been included in some of the programs which now give attention to the mentally retarded and to all other types of physical impairment.

Without the demonstrated results in the United States, it is quite probable that the other countries would still have closed doors to the promotion of employment of blind persons who are providing the spark of inspiration for rehabilitation administrators and staff workers all over the world. An employed native of Central Africa, factory workers in South America and India, a blind farmer in Central Europe who has been trained in a European farm school, blind rehabilitation staff members in all the countries, hundreds of dictaphone typists in government departments of the United States, thousands of college students and blind persons in professions—all of these at the present time owe a debt of appreciation to the Randolph-Sheppard Act, its promoter, its sponsors and administrators.

The administration of this legislation has proven that the welfare of blind persons in one country affects the welfare of blind persons in all other countries, and that blindness doesn't exist in solitary confinement in a water-tight compartment.